

only fools rush in by stardustupinlights

Series: put your hand inside of mine [4]

Category: Yu-Gi-Oh! VRAINS

Genre: Anger, Angst, Angst with a Happy Ending, Hugs, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Sadness, Tears, hugsaku, hugsaku2019, yes i wrote angst for a hugging event shhhh

Characters: Fujiki Yuusaku, Revolver | Kougami Ryouken

Language: English

Status: Completed

Published: 2019-09-18

Updated: 2019-09-18

Packaged: 2022-03-22 02:08:20

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 7,145

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Story URL: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/20687990>

Author

URL:

<https://archiveofourown.org/users/stardustupinlights/pseuds/stardustupinlights>

Summary:

There's more than a few words that they've been holding back, and there's only so much they can take, as stubborn as they are, before what's boiling under the surface bursts out.

Relationships: Fujiki Yuusaku/Revolver | Kougami Ryouken

Series: put your hand inside of mine [4]

Series URL: <https://archiveofourown.org/series/1303448>

Comments: 15

Kudos: 58

only fools rush in

Author's Note:

Hello, yes, I did a thing! I'm very excited for this Hugsaku event and while I'm not following the prompts I thought I should make a contribution anyways, because HUGS. I apparently decided angst was the best way to get more hugs so excuse me for this, if I made you cry I'm sorry BUT I have another Hugsaku in the works. Unfortunately, it might be late because I'm really busy with uni lately, but it will come! Gotta soothe the pain with something, right?

Please enjoy!

There's something about the quiet before the storm that Yusaku's become eerily familiar with, and sometimes it worries him how easy it is for him to accept it and settle into it by bracing himself for the worst. He can recognize the signs, though the feeling of *'something bad is coming'* that shows up inside him whatever things get too quiet and silence is too lengthy is what makes him notice it the most.

There was simultaneously a lot and too little happening right after he beat Bohman, and there were also too many feelings inside of him to process in the moment. There was relief there, that most of them were back, that Ryoken wasn't turned into data literal days after he started getting along with Ai, that the sacrifice of everyone else wasn't void of meaning or purpose— but then the loss of the Ignis processed and he could feel with every nerve in his body that even if nothing was in vain, they had lost too much.

It didn't sink in until Ai left with no trace behind, taking Roboppi with him. There were a few angry tears he didn't want to admit were more than angry – Ryoken wiped those, softly, arms around him in an embrace that lured him deeply into comfort he never had before – and then there was some obsessive research, searching for any signs of Ai with a degree of obsession that constantly worried Ryoken and made him more distant than ever. He gave it up when he realized Ai probably needed the space— but it seemed

that after he started looking up and not overthinking it too much, the signs of other things going askew became apparent.

It started off so subtle that Yusaku barely even noticed it was happening at first. His dates with Ryoken being suddenly cut short, sleepovers gradually going from a one-week stay to only over the weekends, his attempts at intimacy being met with reluctant reciprocation up until things got too heated and Ryoken decided to distract him with something else, usually homework or casual conversations that managed to suck him up because Yusaku is always fascinated by everything that comes out of Ryoken's mouth.

The signs *are* there, though, in the way Ryoken sometimes seems to get lost inside his own head when he thinks Yusaku isn't watching him – he's always watching him, he can't possibly look away from him and he doesn't want or plans to – and in how from time to time, during fleeting glances, he now looks at Yusaku as if he's trying to memorize his every feature, like any second now he won't have a right to.

It makes him anxious, has him feeling as if there's something Ryoken wants to speak with him about but can't bring himself to do it; like he's holding his tongue, like he's also scared of this change of behavior. There are little moments that make him think he's overthinking things, like when Ryoken holds him close to his chest and hums songs under his breath right next to his ear and runs a hand through his hair or his back or both, but it isn't long until Yusaku realizes that this is just another way for Ryoken to enjoy something he knows for a fact he's going to lose for one last time.

The realization of what's happening hits him like a truck when he wakes up and notices Ryoken isn't by his side after a much needed weekend together just relaxing, the space where he should be already cold from how long he's been gone, and it makes a knot form in his throat and fear, frigid and overwhelming, take over his limbs causing his hands to start shaking right as the thought of what he thinks this is hits him.

Ryoken is planning to break up with him.

Yusaku sits there in silence, staring down at the shirt he's been using as pajamas for a while now that actually belong to Ryoken as if it holds the answers to all of his questions. It doesn't, of course, but Yusaku feels like if he moves he'll probably break down and he doesn't want to do that just yet, because he's assuming things and it would not be fair for him to accept it without questioning Ryoken about it.

But something inside him insists and knows that his hypothesis is correct, that at the very least Ryoken is preparing himself to leave him even if he hasn't made the decision yet. It's a gut feeling, good old-fashioned instinct that has rarely failed him before, the kind that's so strong and that it usually only shows up during duels that demands attention and points fingers at everything that's wrong and screams for him to fix it.

He can't fix Ryoken if he's fallen out of love, though. Yusaku can fix a computer, a Duel Disk, a math problem, an impossible situation during life-threatening duels, but he hasn't quite figured out how to fix feelings, especially if they're not there anymore. He tried to fix himself for years and it didn't work out. He doubts there's a way to do so that isn't time, and experience has shown him that even that can fail.

Yusaku doesn't know how much time passes from the second he woke up to now, and only moves when he hears the door being opened and footsteps coming down the hallway to the bedroom, turns just in time to watch Ryoken open the door to his bedroom and make eye contact with him from across the room and up the stairs.

He must have noticed something in his eyes that Yusaku isn't aware is there, because his casual expression crumbles into a worried frown and the paper bag he's holding wrinkles under the clenching of his fist around it. Still, there's something cautious in the air, about him, in the way he doesn't hurry down the stairs and instead walks calmly until he's standing over him, at the edge of the futon. Bed hunting was paused after Bohman, because Yusaku couldn't bring himself to deal with such a detail that seems so unimportant when the Ignis are all gone and life is barely returning to some semblance of normalcy he thought he would be able to fit right into again.

“Yusaku,” Ryoken says, swallowing, as serious as ever and tense, clearly trying to not show how concerned he actually is. It makes him look away from him, avoid his eyes, because there’s something wrong with them and about what they’re trying to tell him. He stares at his shirt again instead, moves a shaking hand up to fix the way the sleeve runs down his shoulder from how big it is on him. “Yusaku, is something wrong?”

The question makes something in his chest tighten, and he starts shaking his head, a bit incredulously, because *of course there is, you’ve been standing there staring and doing nothing about what you think might be happening and it feels like you’re not even here anymore, you’ve been absent—*

Yusaku takes a very deep breath, looks up at Ryoken knowing his face must look like an open book, all his insecurities out in the open for him to read, all his fear as present as it has never been. Their eyes meet, so Yusaku gets to see the way Ryoken’s narrow slightly with an emotion he can’t put a name to before he’s kneeling over the futon, the paper bag being abandoned on the ground right next to him and almost tipping over. Ryoken pulls him closer, wraps his arms around him and guides Yusaku’s head so it’s buried against his neck, his chin resting on top of it.

He does not hesitate to hug him back and holds him close to him with all his strength, feeling both like he’s being reassured and lied to within the same action.

“You know, don’t you?,” Ryoken whispers, his voice tight with how much he’s restraining his own feelings, and the confirmation of his fear makes Yusaku shake harder, grab at Ryoken’s shirt with the intention of not letting go, anger and heartbreak building and making his eyes water to the point he’s angrily blinking the tears away, determined not to give up here, because this can’t happen. He won’t allow it. “I’m sorry, Yusaku, but I have to—”

“Shut up,” Yusaku snaps, squeezes his eyes shut, shakes his head and leans on the anger to keep himself together so he can’t stop this nonsense, get rid of this issue because *Ryoken can’t do this to them, not after everything.* “You need to shut up and fucking listen to me because I have no idea what’s

going on with you but I can assure you that you're getting it all wrong, whatever it is."

Ryoken sighs, shakes his head. "Yusaku, you can't possibly—"

"I know you, Ryoken. I do," Yusaku grabs his shoulders, pulls away from his arms and makes eye contact again, catches the vulnerability behind the cold wall of ice that is his gaze, and feels his resolve to keep this from happening becoming even stronger, grounding him. "I won't claim to know exactly what you're thinking, but I know you and the way you deny yourself the things you want for someone or something else and I'm telling you it needs to stop because I'm *not* letting you break up with me."

Ryoken flinches and looks off to the side, running one of his hands through his hair like he has no idea where to even begin, how to explain, how to fucking *communicate* like a normal human being. Yusaku can't even complain or be upset about his lack of willingness to communicate his thoughts and feelings, because he's been avoiding it himself since day one in hopes that not talking about things would eventually lead to everything figuring itself out, keeping him from making his feelings explicit for his own sake.

But here he is now, holding back tears and trying to keep both of them from drowning with the consequences of rushing into a relationship and telling his boyfriend to keep his explicit feelings to himself so he wouldn't be hurt later down the line by the memory of it. That strategy certainly proved to be weak and shortsighted; he underestimated just how far Ryoken could take his own self-destructive tendencies and let his guilt make decisions for him.

"I'm not— I'm not trying to do that," Ryoken finally blurts out, unsure of how to express himself, but the words do bring a great deal of relief to Yusaku, soothe his heart even if he feels like that's a lie, like Ryoken is confused about this himself, like he isn't *sure*. "I just... Yusaku, I've been thinking, and I don't think it's a good idea to be together."

"*Why would you think that?*" Yusaku stresses out the words, his voice pulled tight, because that's the most important question he should be asking right now. Ryoken shakes his head, so Yusaku brings a hand to his cheek,

fingers running over soft skin, a strong cheekbone, over the sharpness of his jawline. He's done this a thousand times before, enjoyed being able to touch Ryoken to his liking, but it feels desperate now, more so than usual. "Ryoken, why would you suddenly think that? A month ago you were—"

"Saying that I want to be better for you. And I do," Ryoken swallows, his eyebrows furrowing and creating wrinkles in the space between them that Yusaku feels the need to smooth out but doesn't. "But I won't be. I've had... lapses in judgment, ever since I came back to Den City. What happened in my duel against Lighting proved that."

Yusaku feels the blood in his veins run cold at the reminder, the image of Ryoken disappearing making fear spike inside him, Jin's terrified eyes flashing across his mind, and he finds himself making a quiet noise of distress, holding onto Ryoken even tighter. "That wasn't your fault. Lighting was provoking you. He wanted you to prove him right."

"And I almost did. Yusaku, they are all *gone*," Ryoken's voice hardens, going from the soft, casual, heart-melting sounds he's used to hearing to the harsher tones Yusaku would normally associate with Revolver, or with Ryoken being particularly angry or even turned on. It makes him feel like this conversation might get out of hand, but for once, he doesn't want to avoid it, to save it for later—they need to confront this. "The Dark Ignis is missing. We can't trust it when it didn't even give us a warning before leaving. I'm meant to make sure it doesn't do something dangerous, and my duel against the Light Ignis just proved just how irresponsible I've been acting—I've been too forgiving."

"Ryoken, that's not—"

"You can't see it," he interrupts him, not unkindly, bringing a hand up to lay over the one Yusaku has over his cheek, grabbing it and pulling it away and down, intertwining their fingers together. "You have been around the Dark Ignis for too long, and you got too attached—"

Yusaku digs his nails into Ryoken's skin, anger flaring inside him at the thought that Ryoken is making this about the Ignis instead of about the two

of them, his breath quickening and his body suddenly feeling both warm and cold at the same time.

“You mean I should have done as you did?” The words feel and sound like venom, and Yusaku has problems keeping his tone level, not raising it for the sake of keeping himself under some semblance of control. But still, they come out, and he can’t stop them from feeling like acid. “Pretend to feel absolutely nothing, maybe leave Ai behind for a few months and then come back like that will make everything better? Should I do what you two did and abandon both of you and run away?”

Ryoken stares in silence, his mouth slightly open, shocked to the point of being speechless. Yusaku looks away from his face to stand and walks around the room to try to calm down, but he’s angry. He doesn’t want to be, because he knows it will make it harder to have a reasonable conversation, but it’s hard, so, so *hard*, when Ryoken is thinking about following an ideology that’s so deeply ingrained into his brain that he can’t even tell he doesn’t rule himself by it anymore, or at the very least that he doesn’t *need* to.

“That’s not what I mean,” Yusaku looks towards him, sees him standing and obviously struggling to not get closer to him like he probably wants to, and the thought makes Yusaku sigh, close his eyes, momentarily making him wish he had accepted that offer from Bohman of a fantasy world with no pain and only Ryoken’s love. “Yusaku, you know I didn’t mean that—”

“Do I? I was alone for three months and I have loved you for longer than that. I have avoided talking with you about this because I know, I *know* you need the space but sometimes I can’t help but think all you want to do is run away again,” Yusaku wraps his arms around himself, feeling like he’s going to start hyperventilating any moment now. Ryoken looks like a deer caught in the headlights now, like he has no idea what Yusaku is talking about, and for one bitter second, Yusaku allows himself to feel some satisfaction from making Ryoken feel as confused as he is. But then that feeling is gone as quickly as it appears and all he wants is to convince Ryoken he is going about this all wrong; so wrong Yusaku could and probably will cry. “Every time the subject of us came up during the warfare we tried to ignore it, but

when we didn't you couldn't help but talk about the Ignis and you still do it now and I'm so sick of it—"

"I bring up the Ignis because I have to!" Ryoken snaps, his voice dangerously raising and making Yusaku flinch. He's frowning, but he doesn't look anywhere near angry; he's desperate, like he doesn't know exactly what to do or how to keep this from blowing up in their faces. "You know I will do what's necessary if I'm given a reason to do so and I don't want you to be chained to me if— no, *when* that happens, because it will!"

Yusaku closes his eyes and looks away, because he's always been extremely aware that the line between love and duty becomes blurry for Ryoken when it comes to the two of them, to all they have been through and all they've shared. He always knew that this would eventually happen; Ai's disappearance was just the catalyst they needed for this conversation to happen, to *really* happen. No silence in the air for them to assume things, no clipped comments about what they would do afterward, about Ai's future. It has to be now, while Ai is still missing but nothing has happened, because they have to be prepared for anything, and they have to know where they stand, be it together or apart.

It's been too calm lately, anyways.

"What are you saying, Ryoken?" Yusaku asks, his voice barely above a whisper and refusing to look at him, to open his eyes. He can't do that right now. "What do you mean?"

Yusaku hears Ryoken stepping closer to him, stopping right before reaching him, and feels his sigh against his forehead, shivers because his skin feels like it's crawling with the intensity of the last few minutes. He waits, being as patient as ever because he knows there is no way of rushing this. Finding the right words is never easily done.

"When the time comes, if the Dark Ignis openly goes against humans, I will have to deal with it without any mercy. No do-overs, no trial, no second chances," Ryoken pauses, seems to try and get himself together in preparation for what he's going to say, and Yusaku stiffens out of pure anticipation. "And you will inevitably come to resent me for that, maybe

even hate me. And we can't pretend like being with me afterward won't hurt you—"

"Don't," Yusaku opens his eyes, stares at Ryoken and feels his eyes watering again, struggles to blink the tears away once more. "Don't you dare say I'll hate you like I wouldn't understand why you'd do that. As if it were that easy for me to change my mind about you, about us. Don't do that."

"Yusaku, the Dark Ignis is a part of you," Ryoken takes a deep breath, stretches out his arm to grab his elbow, pulling him closer and looking like he's already regretting doing so, like he sees it as yet another weakness he can't help. "I could never make up for that. Never. I can't and I'm *not* good enough to even try. I will hurt you by doing what has to be done and I really don't want my feelings to keep you chained down—"

"*Chained?* Could you just stop and listen? This is not about Ai or the Ignis, Ryoken, this is about you and me," Yusaku takes Ryoken's free hand in his, squeezes with all his strength for the sake of getting his point across, but he's not really thinking much about the words coming out of his mouth. Ryoken— no, they both need unfiltered honesty. It's the only way they might get to understand what the other is saying, even if it might hurt them. "Forget the Ignis for five seconds, Ryoken, *please*. Every day it's like that small part of you I get becomes smaller because of them and I *can't* watch you become your father. I'm not dating *him*. He's *dead* and all he ever did for you was to leave all of his mistakes behind for you to handle!"

Ryoken makes choked off sound, deep in the back of his throat, and his frown returns, deeper than before, his voice shifting into something sharp and cold. His eyes seem to become brighter, and his breath rushes out of him when he speaks. "You can't talk about him like you knew him—"

"I don't need to, Ryoken," he tries to pull his hand back from Yusaku's grip, but he just holds on tighter, shakes his head and holds eye contact because Ryoken needs to know the things Yusaku's been thinking about for so long now, even if he doesn't like them. He needs to face the facts. "He tortured children. He created the Ignis. He activated the Tower of Hanoi, and he wanted millions of people to die with him. He expected you to die *for him*."

All because he made a mistake he was obsessed with solving, and you know this is the truth. He isn't *you*, so don't become *him*."

Ryoken's eyes are wide, his hands are shaking, and he seems to be struggling to regain his breath.

"Stop," he says, as pale as Yusaku has ever seen him, shaking his head. His voice breaks on his next words. "Yusaku, you— I can't just *do* this. I can't just leave it all behind. You know this."

"I do," Yusaku nods, agrees, takes the fact that Ryoken hasn't tried to pull away again as a good thing, as a sign that maybe this won't turn out wrong. "But you're putting the things he did, the mistakes he made, the things he expected, all of it at the top of your list. You're putting it over your own happiness, and over us—"

"It's not like we're exactly perfect," Ryoken's words drip out of his mouth, poisonous and making Yusaku's anger flare again. His tone makes him feel like he's talking to the old Revolver, the one who was planning to die at the hands of his father's creations without any hesitation whatsoever. "I kept information from you. I allowed people to pursue you. I kidnapped you when you were six—"

"And you were eight, Ryoken!"

"I knew full well my father had plans I couldn't understand and I should have never brought you home with me!"

"Ryoken, you saved my life—"

"I shouldn't have gotten involved, Yusaku. Don't you see it? This is all on me. None of this would have happened if it wasn't for me," Ryoken pauses, realizes his grip on his elbow has reached the point of bruising and lets go entirely of it. Yusaku barely feels anything that isn't his emotions threatening to spill over with every word out of Ryoken's mouth, but he refuses to let this go, to let *him* go, so he digs his nails into his hand for a brief second. "You could be happy right now if it wasn't for me. You could be normal and have a family. You deserve that."

Yusaku takes a very deep breath and looks deeply into Ryoken's eyes. "Or I could be dead."

Ryoken freezes, blinks, and presses his lips together into a thin line. "No."

Yusaku closes his eyes, very briefly, and lets his shoulders slump, the fight drained out of his body. "I would be dead, Ryoken. And I wouldn't be the only one. You're the only reason we're alive, as broken as we are."

Ryoken struggles to keep eye contact, to cling to his anger about Yusaku's opinion on his father, but it's a futile attempt. Yusaku knows Ryoken dislikes any talk about dying, probably because he knows how willing he is to do so and how guilty he would feel if Yusaku was gone, or if any other innocents were gone and he wasn't. It's something that saddens him; Ryoken has always been too ready to leave his life behind for others or for a cause, to sacrifice any personal wish for the sake of justice or doing what he thinks is right.

Yusaku always wonders how many opportunities to have a normal life he's dropped ever since the Lost Incident purely out of guilt, be it for the experiments themselves or because of what happened to his father. Yusaku wouldn't say that there's such a thing as deserving a good, normal, happy life, because awful people can get the best life has to offer out of pure coincidence or fate while good, fair and honest people get the short end of the stick, but it says a lot about Ryoken that, unlike the rest of them, he had a chance to move on and couldn't.

A lesser man would have left it all behind— especially at the age of eight. And now his choice to take responsibility for mistakes that aren't even his own is making Ryoken bite the bullet every single time, with no consideration for himself whatsoever.

Yusaku swallows as something behind Ryoken's eyes seems to break, steps closer to him and allows him to caress his cheek, to run his thumb over his lips as the realization of what they're doing washes over him.

"I love you," Ryoken whispers, lays a chaste kiss on his lips and lingers, shakes his head like he can't quite handle the emotion. He looks like he's in

pain, like admitting this freely is threatening to tear him apart, and Yusaku can understand, can feel that same tightness in his throat that Ryoken struggles to swallow, knows his eyes are just as misty as Ryoken's are looking. "I love you, and I don't know what to do about it because I don't want to keep hurting you. I can't allow myself to have you and take responsibility over Ai at the same time."

Ai's name on Ryoken's lips sends a thrill down his spine, but it doesn't distract him from his words. "You're not responsible for everything, Ryoken. Ai, he... he's my partner. You said it yourself, we have a connection and it's on me to make sure he doesn't do something he'll regret. I own him that."

"It won't stop me from intervening the second he takes a wrong step," Ryoken runs a hand through his hair, squeezes his eyes shut as if he wants nothing more than to pretend this isn't happening. Yusaku grabs at his shirt, holds on tightly because he knows where his mind is going and has his suspicions confirmed the second he opens his eyes to meet his gaze. "It would be best if our feelings weren't compromised if that time comes. We'll be on the same side again, but our goals are going to differ once more."

"Ryoken," Yusaku pauses, thinks about what he wants to say again, and decides with a helpless sigh that there's no way around this, that what Ryoken is asking will probably hurt them more than he thinks it will. "Ryoken, if you leave me, I'm coming with you. You know what would hurt me the most right now, with Ai and the rest of the Ignis gone?"

Ryoken takes in a deep breath and shakes his head.

"To be alone again," Yusaku shrugs, thinks about how such simple words can make his chest hurt, his hands shake, and then keeps himself from leaning on Ryoken for comfort, instead watching how Ryoken's shoulders slump and how his face paints a clear picture of regret. "I already told you, you're the only one I can truly be honest with. My feelings, my thoughts, my pain... I thought I had spelled it out for you. Ai is my friend, Ryoken, my partner, but you're the one I'm in love with. I want a future with you, as much I want Ai to come back alright."

Silence grows between them, filling the room and allowing Yusaku to be aware of himself, of how tired he feels and how cold he is. His eyes drift back to the futon, the warm sheets, but the sight brings him no comfort whatsoever.

Ryoken's hand takes hold of the one Yusaku has idly grabbing at his shirt, gives it a good squeeze to get him to meet his eyes, and finds his expression twisted, torn between sadness and desperation. "It's like you're asking me to hurt you again."

At that, a chuckle bubbles up Yusaku's throat, dry, short and lacking any real amusement or happiness. "Ryoken, I'm asking you to stay. That's all I've ever wanted from you. To *stay*."

Yusaku steps closer to Ryoken, sets his hands on his shoulders and tries to convey with one look all the emotions he's feeling. It's an impossible task, of course; Yusaku's never been the most expressive person, but this would be hard for anyone in this situation. There's so much he wants to say but can't find the right words for and for once he can't rely on honesty or bluntness to lead him to the right path. He can feel his own face twisting with the effort to hold himself back from spilling tears, his lips shaking.

He hasn't been this desperate to have something in years. Perhaps this is why he's been delaying this talk; the possibility of losing Ryoken after everything is way too real, caused too much fear to breed inside his heart.

"Just stay," Yusaku whispers, buries his face in Ryoken's neck and breathes in the scent of the cheap soap that indicates he took a shower before going out, catches the remnants of the cologne he wore yesterday when he arrived. "We can figure out Ai together, Ryoken. You don't have to push me away. *Stay*."

Ryoken's chest shakes, his hands fall briefly on Yusaku's shoulders and then his arms are wrapping themselves around him, pulling him in, hugging him like he needs him, like he if he doesn't then everything would crumble to pieces and burn down around them. He's inclined to believe this.

A sob escapes Yusaku's throat and Ryoken holds onto him even harder. It is then that he hears the ragged breathing, the struggle to inhale and exhale coming from him right against his ear. Yusaku closes his eyes, letting it all happen.

He doesn't know how long they stand there crying, pouring out all of their feelings and clinging to each other. There's something restrained about Ryoken even now, like he can't quite bring himself to openly sob, like crying is a foreign thing for him to do, and it only brings him even more pain, makes him choke on his breath and cough and press his lips against Ryoken's neck, his jaw, his cheek, soaks him with all the love he has for him and tries to get him to understand through gestures alone what he can't bring himself to say.

Eventually, Ryoken reciprocates the kisses, the affection, makes Yusaku feel like a weight just disappeared off his back, and he's able to fully melt into the hug to feel the pure, unconditional love Ryoken's been trying to hold back.

"Just stay," Yusaku swallows, fighting back more tears. "I'll even give you three reasons if you want."

Despite the way his arms are bruising around his body, Ryoken snorts, cracks a smile against the skin of Yusaku's temple before kissing it. "No, that's... that's not necessary."

"I *need* you to understand," his voice cracks on the second word, and Yusaku digs his nails into Ryoken's shoulders, trying to keep his breathing steady. "I love you. Nothing will change that. You could—you could get rid of Ai, and even then those feelings wouldn't just go away, Ryoken. There's no way I could ever move on from us."

"That isn't what I wanted," Ryoken leans away to make eye contact, allows Yusaku to watch him at his most vulnerable; fat tears rolling down his cheeks, his skin flushed red, his eyes bloodshot and watering every time he blinks the tears away. And even then, he looks more like an actor trained to cry on command and look pretty at the same time; impossible as ever. "You were not supposed to—"

"What, fall in love with you?" Yusaku snorts, shaking his head, and uses Ryoken's shirt as a handkerchief, caring very little about what he has to say about it not being sanitary. "After the things I said at the Tower of Hanoi, Valentine's Day, ... you expected me to just not fall in love?"

Ryoken at least has the nerve to look a bit chastised by his words. "Would it be bad if I said yes?"

Yusaku doesn't answer and instead just grabs his hair, pulls him down to kiss him, deep but slow, measured and almost shy because the fear is still there and will probably never go away, but he doesn't want it to grow. He wants it to stay small, manageable, for it to be just like the descriptions of relationship anxiety he's read online that will fade away with time and mutual communication.

They have failed at that last one already, though. But a start is a start.

"You're so dumb," Yusaku says once he breaks away from the kiss, not a trace of teasing in his voice. He's dead serious. "You're seriously so fucking dumb, Ryoken."

"That's an odd way of complimenting me," he tries to use a lighter tone, probably trying to bring up the mood, but Yusaku just shakes his head, feels his breath shortening when Ryoken frowns once more. "You know I have a point."

"You have a guilt complex," is Yusaku's immediate response. Ryoken opens his mouth to most likely deny it, but Yusaku just kisses him again, then again, then once more and lingers, sighs against his lips. "You don't want to hurt me and I get that. But breaking up just for the small possibility that I'll feel more comfortable resenting you about whatever happens to Ai is not the way. You are a logical person, Ryoken. Your brain is full of things that sometimes I struggle to keep up with. Use that logic and understand that this is not a one-off thing or a fluke. I love you, and you love me, and now we're stuck together."

"Just like that?"

"No, because you won't let it happen. You'll brood over it for a few days, maybe weeks, and then you'll try this again and I'll have to call you dumb again and we'll cry again—"

Ryoken kisses the words off his lips, a kiss far more aggressive and demanding than their previous ones. Yusaku is eager to respond, to open his mouth when Ryoken's tongue licks at his lips, pulls him closer until it's a bit awkward to be standing and kissing at the same time. A shiver runs down his spine as Ryoken's fingers dance over the skin of his shoulder, when one hand grips his hip.

"Ryoken," Yusaku mumbles, his lips drifting to press against his neck, so soft that he isn't exactly sure he's said it out loud. "I love you. I really do. I — I can't do this without you by my side."

It gives Ryoken pause, a slight second of hesitation that makes his heart shake. "I don't want for you to face it alone. I don't... I don't want to run away."

Yusaku takes a deep breath, his voice shaking, "Then, for fuck's sake, *stay*."

Silence follow his words, unbearably loud; Yusaku has never heard something so deafening yet so empty in his life, like an endless void, like he's suddenly wearing noise-canceling headphones. Ryoken wraps his arms around him again, pulls him in, melts his heart and makes even more tears spill from his eyes with the way he *knows* what he means by it. He isn't surprised by how the hug is hesitant at first and then becomes earnest as his hold on him tightens, showing how scared he is of losing something that they can't deny is good, even when it's messy.

"I'm so tired, Yusaku," he whispers, right against his ear, his voice wrecked almost beyond recognition due to the emotion being it. "I'm so tired of looking to please him. I don't want to be him. But just this one time— could you stay on the side, if something happens? You don't need to get involved. You don't need to watch Ai's downfall."

"No," Yusaku shakes his head, closing his eyes. His mind is terrifying calm right now, yet wide awake. "I can't. I don't want to watch it, but I owe him

that much, Ryoken. We owe him that."

Ryoken sighs, drops a kiss on top of his head. "We're doing this together, then."

What that means exactly is unclear, and he thinks they both know that. Ryoken almost certainly has already made moves he doesn't know about all that time he's been away from him, and he would have to be updated on them, he would have to discuss this with Takeru and Kusanagi-san, he would have to put any hesitation aside and face it all—but not alone. There are still things they need to talk about, details that need to be addressed, but he cherishes this moment of peace up until Ryoken pulls away, making him look up at him to meet his gaze.

"We should relax over breakfast," he says, setting a hand on his shoulder and rubbing the skin, reassurance coming off him despite how tired he looks, a feeling that no doubt Yusaku also has etched all over his face.

It turns out Ryoken didn't leave the bed that morning with the intention to freak him out. This should have been obvious, in hindsight, but it wasn't, and now he was sitting on the futon as Ryoken handed him a heavy sandwich, so big and stuffed that he knows this is probably from a very expensive place. He sits across him, his jacket off to reveal the short sleeves of his shirt. They should sit at Yusaku's small kitchen table, or his couch, or at least heat up the food, but they don't. All Yusaku wants is to take a nap and to be held, to wake up later knowing they're on the same page, or at least close to it.

"I'm sorry," Yusau starts, barely a few bites in. He has no appetite whatsoever, but he has to eat and he doesn't want to waste a fresh breakfast, regardless of whether it's cold or not. He's had worse. Ryoken seems startled at his words, deep inside his own head, and looks a bit puzzled when their eyes meet. "I'm sorry about the things I said about your father."

Ryoken's expression turns immediately into a frown. "It's fine, you have all the right to hate him—"

“It’s not that. He was a sociopath,” Yusaku pauses, gauging Ryoken’s reaction, but he looks unsurprised at the comment; it hits him how honest Ryoken is being when he says he believes Yusaku has a right to feel however he wants to feel about the man who tortured him. As a result of it, his voice softens. “But you aren’t him. You aren’t turning into him; you never could. I dislike comparing you to him at all, but every time you talk about the Ignis like that, like you were their creator, I can’t help but do it.”

“I understand that. I sometimes worry, as well, that when I see you I’m not seeing you, but rather the kid I took off the street,” Ryoken sighs, shaking his head. His sandwich looks sad in his hand, like it’s reflecting his feelings, and it’s uncharacteristically fitting, as well as a bit disheartening, that even inanimate objects are affected by Ryoken. “I’m awful at this.”

Yusaku nods. “We both are.”

“I’ve been looking for him,” Ryoken shrugs, taking a bite of his breakfast automatically, as if he’s eating more out of habit than out of need. “I haven’t found anything. Every day that passes I get more worried that he might be scheming something, especially since he took Roboppi from you.”

“I was like that when he left the first time,” Yusaku points out, but it sounds weak even to his own ears. Ryoken shoots him a raised eyebrow, so he sighs. “I know. It’s not the same. He had hope before.”

Ryoken moves over to sit beside him instead of in front of him to wrap an arm around his shoulders. Yusaku goes willingly, closes his eyes and wishes time could freeze like this, in a perfect picture of peace. The pain in his chest is soothed by the action, but only so much. It’s going to take a while for him to not be worried and anxious about everything.

“We’ll figure it out when it hits us,” Ryoken declares, dumping his sandwich, half-finished, back into its bag. He takes Yusaku’s from him, for once not overthinking him having a proper meal, and then tilts his chin up, kisses him again and again and again and a few more times until Yusaku can’t help but push him down, straddle him, get his hands under his shirt to touch the skin of his lean muscles, run his hands all over the chest he loves because fuck does Ryoken have stellar pecs.

“I love you,” Yusaku whispers, kissing his neck, and Ryoken sighs like he can’t quite believe it. “You’ve known it for a while.”

Yusaku’s teeth bite playfully at his perfect collarbone and Ryoken chuckles, a bit breathless, “Show it to me, then.”

“Is that a challenge?”

Yusaku meets his eyes, and finds the blue darker, the way they’re narrowed sending heat right down to his groin the second a teasing smirk starts growing over Ryoken’s lips. Within seconds, Yusaku’s been effectively seduced; he’d do anything Ryoken asked of him, not unlike a sailor would for a siren, but he’s already been given a proposition, if indirectly.

Ryoken’s smirk sharpens when he realizes he’s successfully conquered Yusaku once more. “You know it is.”

Yusaku shoves his tongue down Ryoken’s throat to shut him up, but he knows better. He will never stop having such a quick, skilled, silver tongue, and he loves it like that. He wouldn’t change the many hours of simple yet blinding happiness Ryoken’s given him for anything if that meant less extraneous or sass – like he doesn’t have that by himself at all –, and he’s ready to let him know that every single day from now on.

“Yusaku,” Ryoken whispers against his lips, still playful. “I love you.”

His heart swells, and he can’t help but shake his head, taking a deep cleansing breath that feels like it’s clearing up the air around them, acknowledging the hard feelings while simultaneously accepting them as part of who they are. He feels lighter than ever, even with thoughts of Ai and of what’s to come running through his mind in the background.

It’ll be alright.

“I know.”

Author's Note:

[huggus you]